

Rebecca Mary's Diary

BY ANNIE HAMILTON DONNELL

REBECCA MARY decided to keep a diary. It was not an inspiration, though it was rather like one in its suddenness. Of course she had always known that Aunt Olivia kept a diary. When she was very small she had stretched a-tiptoe and with little pointing forefinger counted rows and rows of little black books that Aunt Olivia had "kept." Each little black book had its year-label pasted neatly on the back. Rebecca Mary breathed deep breaths of awe, there were so many of them. There must be so much weather in those little black books—so many pleasant days, rainy days, storms, and snows!

It was Rebecca Mary who remembered that it was Tuesday, and that it had showered a little Wednesday,—shone Thursday,—showered again on Friday. Rebecca Mary was the jog to Aunt Olivia's memory. It gave her now, at the beginning of her own diary career, an experienced feeling, as if she knew already how to keep a diary. It made it seem a much simpler matter to begin.

And then, of course, the minister's littlest little boy—really it was the minister's littlest little boy who had started Rebecca Mary. He had volunteered a peep into his own diary, and made whispered explanations and suggestions. He let Rebecca Mary read some of the entries: "*Mundy*, plesent and good. *Tuesday*, rany and bad. *Wensdy*, sum plesent and not good enuf to hirt. *Thirsdy*—" but he had hastily withdrawn the book at "*Thirsdy*," and a tidal wave of warm red blood had flowed up over his little brown ears and in around all the little brown islands of his freckles. So Rebecca Mary had begun hastily to talk of other things. For the minister's littlest little boy had explained that the first statement in each entry referred to the weather and the second to the deportment of the writer, and Rebecca Mary had remarked a sympathetic resemblance be-

tween the two statements. She had caught a fleeting glimpse of the weather part of "*Thirsdy*"—she could guess the rest. Better let the curtain fall on "*Thirsdy*." On her way home Rebecca Mary decided to keep a diary herself. Her first day's record had been a good deal like the "*Mundy*" of the minister's littlest little boy, only there were more a's in the weather. After that, little by little, she branched out into a certain originality—the Rebecca Mary sort. If she had not been hampered by circumstances, it would have been easier to be original. The most hampering circumstance was the cook-book itself, which she was driven to use in her new undertaking. There was room on the blank leaves and above and below the recipes for cake and pudding and pie. The book was one Aunt Olivia had given her long ago to draw impossible pictures in.

In the beginning Rebecca Mary tried pasting pieces of "empty" paper over the pies and puddings and cakes, but the empty paper was too transparent. In rather startling places things were liable to show through.

As: "*Sunday*.—It rained a level teaspoonful. Aunt Olivia and I went to church. The text was thou shalt not steal 1½ cups of sour milk—" Rebecca Mary got no farther than that. She was a little appalled at the result thus far, and hastily turned a page and began again in a blank space where no intrusive pudding could break through and corrupt. Thereafter she wrote above and below the recipes and pasted no more thin veils over them. It seemed safer.

Aunt Olivia, apparently oblivious to what was going on, yet saw and did not disapprove. It was to be expected that the child should come into her inheritance sometime, early or late. If early,—well.

"It's the Plummer in her. All the Plummers have kept diaries," Aunt Olivia mused, knitting stolidly on while

the child stooped painfully to her self-imposed task. The quaint resemblance to herself at her own diary-writing did not escape her, and she smiled a little in the Aunt Olivia way that scarcely stirred her lips. Aunt Olivia smiled oftener now when she looked at the child. She was "failing" a little, Plummerly. Between the two of them, little Plummer and big, stretched of late a tie woven of sheets and a gorgeous quilt of a thousand bits. It was not very visible to the naked eye, but they were both rather shyly conscious that it was there. They would never be quite so far apart again.

Rebecca Mary took her diary out to the haunts of Thomas Jefferson and read aloud selections to him, with an odd, conscious little air, as though she were graduating. The great white fellow was a sympathetic auditor, if silence and extreme gravity count. Only once did he ever make comments, and Rebecca Mary could never quite make up her mind whether he laughed then or applauded. When a great white rooster elongates his neck, crooks it ridiculously, flaps his wings and crows, it's hard telling exactly what feeling prompts him. But Rebecca reasoned from past experience and her faith in him,—he had never laughed at her before. It was applause. The especial entry which evoked it was the one that first mentioned an allowance.

"*Thursday*.—I think I'm going to," read Rebecca Mary, slowly. And it was significant that on this Thursday there was no weather. "I haven't decided—I don't *know*, but I think I'm going to ask Aunt Olivia to pay me 5 cents a week. Rhoda says you call it an allowance, and I suppose she knows. She is the minister's daughter. She has 10 cents a week unless she's bad and then she pays the minister an allowance. He charges her 1 cent a sin and he gives it to somebody who is indignant—I think Rhoda said indignant. Then I should think he would give it back to Rhoda. I shant only ask Aunt Olivia for 5 cents,—I think she will be more likely. I haven't decided but I *think* I shall ask her tomorrow after her knap. After knaps you are more rested and maybe things don't look just as they do before knaps.

"*Friday*.—I think I'd better wait until tomorrow. Her knap was rather

short. I've decided to say you needn't allow but 4 if 5 is too much. If she allows I'm going to buy me some crimpers. Rhoda's curls natchurally but she says you can crimp it if it doesn't. I have begun to look at myself in the glass and it fritens me—I guess there ought to be a gh in that—to see how homebly I am. I wonder if it doesn't kind of scare Aunt Olivia. Prehaps if I was pretty like Rhoda she would call me darling and dear instead of Rebecca Mary. I don't blame her much because I *look* like Rebecca Mary.

"*Saturday*.—I think Sunday will be the best time to ask her, just after she gets home from meeting and has rolled her bonnet strings up, espesially if the minister preaches on the Lord lovething a cheerful giver. I am hoping he will. If I don't get the crimpers I'm going to give up looking in the glass. For I think I'm growing homeblyer right along. There's something the matter with my nose. Rhoda's doesn't run up hill. I never thought about noses before. Aunt Olivia's is a little queer too but I like it because its Aunt Olivia's nose. I wish I knew if Aunt Olivia liked mine. I wish we were better acquainted.

"*Sunday*.—I wish the Lord had created mine curly because I don't *dass* to ask Aunt Olivia. I don't *dass* to, so there. It scares my throat. I suppose its because aunts arnt mothers,—seems as if you'd *dass* to ask your *mother*. I hate to be scart on account of being a Plummer. I'm afraid I'm the only Plummer that ever was—"

The reading suddenly stopped here. This was Sunday, and the last entry was fresh from Rebecca Mary's pencil.

"Thomas Jefferson!" stormed Rebecca Mary, in a little gust of passion, "don't you ever *tell* I was scared! As long as you live!—cross your heart!—oh, I wish I hadn't read that part to you! You're a Plummer too, and you never were scared, and you can't understand—"

The diary was clutched to Rebecca Mary's little flat breast, and with a swirl of starched Sunday skirts the child was gone. She went straight to Aunt Olivia. Red spots of shame flamed in both shallow little cheeks; resolution sat astride her little up-hill nose. She could not bear to go, but it was easier than being ashamed. The pointing fingers of all the



ALL THE PLUMMERS KEPT DIARIES

Plummers pushed her on. Go she must, or be a coward. Long ago—it seemed long to Rebecca Mary—she had stood up straight and stanch and refused to make any more sheets. Was that little girl who had dared, *this* little girl who was afraid? Should that little girl be ashamed of this one?

"Aunt Olivia," steadily, though Rebecca Mary's heart was pounding hard,—
"Aunt Olivia, are—are you well off?"

She had not meant to begin like that, but afterward she was glad that she had.

"My grief!" Aunt Olivia ejaculated in her surprise. What would the child ask next! "Am I well off? If you mean rich, no, I ain't."

"Oh! Then you're—why, I didn't think about your being poor! I shouldn't have thought of asking—that makes a great difference. I never thought of *that*!"

She was off before Aunt Olivia had fully recovered her breath, and the stumping of her heavy little shoes going upstairs was the only distinctly audible sound. In her own room Rebecca Mary stopped, panting. "Oh, I'm glad I didn't get as far as *asking*!" she breathed aloud. "I never thought about her being poor—of course then I wouldn't ask!"

But she squared her shoulders and stood up, straight and unashamed. For she had vindicated herself. She had been ready to ask. She could look that other little girl of the sheets in the face. The Other Little Girl was there, coming to meet her as she advanced to the little looking-glass above the table. But Rebecca Mary waved her back peremptorily.

"Go right back!" she said. "I only came to tell you I wasn't a coward,—that's all. Good-by. For I'm not coming any more. You're sorry I'm homely, and I'm sorry you are, but it doesn't do any good for us to look at each other and groan. It will make us unsatisfied. So I shall turn you back to the wall,—good-by."

But for a very instant they looked sadly into each other's little lean brown-yellow faces. It was a brief ceremony of farewell. "Good-by," smiled Rebecca Mary, bravely. And the lips of The Other Little Girl moved as though saying it too. The Other Little Girl smiled. And neither of them knew that just then she was beautiful.

Aunt Olivia was trying to meet her own courage-test. She had been trying a good many days. Duty—stern, unswerving duty—bade her inspect Rebecca Mary's little cook-book diary. Should she not know—ought she not to know the thoughts that were brewing in the child's mind? How else could she bring her up properly?

"Read it," Duty said; "find out. Are you afraid?"

"I'm ashamed," groaned Aunt Olivia. "Do you think Rebecca Mary would read my diary?"

"Is Rebecca Mary bringing you up?"

Aunt Olivia sometimes thought so. The puzzle that she had begun to try to solve when Rebecca Mary's white, death-struck mother had laid her baby in Aunt Olivia's unaccustomed arms was getting a little more difficult every day. Some days Aunt Olivia wondered if she ought to give it up. Oh, this bringing up—this bringing up of little children!

"If I must," groaned Aunt Olivia, and got as far as taking the little diary in her hands. But she got no farther. She laid it gently down again.

"I can't," she said, firmly, but she could not look Duty in the face as she said it. She had always listened to Duty before.

"You know you ought to—"

"Yes, I know, but I can't! It seems a shameful thing to do. I'm sure I've tried often enough—you know I've tried—"

"I know,—that was good practice. Now stop trying and read it!"

Aunt Olivia flamed up. "I tell you I won't! It's a shameful thing. If I found Rebecca Mary reading one of my diaries, I should send her to bed—"

"Read hers and go to bed yourself. It's your duty to read it. When you bring up a child—"

"I never will again!"

Aunt Olivia read it, with the relentless grip of Duty holding her to the task. But flame-spots crept up through the sallowness of her thin cheeks and made what atonement they could.

It did not take long, though some of the pages she read twice. The weatherless week, when Rebecca Mary had put off her "asking" from day to day, Aunt Olivia went back to the third time. When



"AUNT OLIVIA DIDN'T SAY SO BUT SHE ALMOST DID"

she closed the little book it was not a Plummer face she lifted it to and laid it against for the space of a breath,—a Plummer face would not have been wet.

Then she whirled upon Duty. "Well, I've done it,—I hope you're satisfied!"

"It had to be done," calm Duty responded. "If you think it will make you feel any better, you can send yourself to bed."

"I'm going to," sighed Aunt Olivia, slipping away to her room. A strange little yearning was upon her to hunt up Rebecca Mary and call her darling and dear. But in her heart she knew she should not have the courage to do it. Here was another Plummer coward!

"Why are some people made like me!" she thought, "so it kills 'em to say anything anyways tenderish. Seems to be too much for their vocal organs,—they'd rather do a week's washing."

Other thoughts came to Aunt Olivia as she lay on her bed, doing her whimsical penance for violating the sanctity of the little old cook-book. She was not comfortable. It was a hard bed—nothing was soft of Aunt Olivia's. She moved about on it uneasily.

"When they're dead, we're willing enough to say tenderish things to 'em," her musings ran. "We wish we *had* then. I suppose if Rebecca Mary was—"

She got no farther for the sudden horror that was upon her—that sent her to her feet and to the door. But there she stopped in the blessed relief that drifted in to her on a child's laugh. Somewhere out there Rebecca Mary was laughing in her subdued, sweet way. A cracked, shrill crow followed,—Thomas Jefferson was laughing too.

Rebecca Mary was not dead. There was time to say a "tenderish" thing to her before she lay—before that. Aunt Olivia shut her eyes resolutely to the vision that had intruded upon her musings. It was Rebecca Mary who was laughing somewhere out there that she wanted to see.

The next day was Sunday, and in the quiet of the long afternoon Rebecca Mary read aloud again to Thomas Jefferson. It was from the little cook-book diary. Thomas Jefferson was pecking about the long grass of the orchard.

"Oh, listen!" cried Rebecca Mary, her eyes unwontedly shining. "Listen to this, Thomas Jefferson!"

"*Saturday*.—Wind northwest by Mrs. Tupper's weather vain. Something happened yesterday. Aunt Olivia didn't *say* it, but she most did. She came right out of her bedroom and I saw it in her face! "Dear"—"darling,"—they were both there, and she was looking at me! Nobody *ever* looked "dear—darling" at me before. I suppose my mother would have. If I hadn't had another mother I think I should like to have had Aunt Olivia.

"You feel that way more after you get acquainted. When I get *very* acquainted prehaps I shall tell Aunt Olivia. Its queer, I think, how it isent as easy to say some things as it is to think them. You can wright them easier too. I am glad Ime keeping a diary because I can wright about yesterday and what happened. I shall read it to my grand children—to be continue.

"*Sunday*'—that's today, Thomas Jefferson,—"*Sunday*.—This is yesterday continue, because there was too mutch for one day. Something else beutiful happened. My Aunt Olivia said to me as folows, I have desided to pay you a weakly allowaunce of 10 cents a weak Rebecca Mary. And I never asked her to. And she never said anything about charging me for my sins. I was going to ask her but I found out she was poor. That was a mistake, she isent. She must be *some* well of I think for 10 cents seams a great deal to have of your own every weak. But I shant buy crimpers. Ime going to buy a present for Aunt Olivia byamby. Ime very happy. I wish I knew how to spell hooray."

Suddenly Rebecca Mary was on her feet, waving the cook-book jubilantly.

"Hoo-ray! Hoo-ray! Thomas Jefferson!" she shouted, surprising the gentle Sunday calm. She surprised Thomas Jefferson, too, but he was equal to the occasion,—Thomas Jefferson was a gentleman.

"Hoo-ra-a-a-ay!" he crowed, splendidly, with a fine effect of clapping his hands.

This time there could be no doubt. This was applause.

